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ABSTRACT

This essay, part of a series on change in higher education stemming from the American Council on Education (ACE) Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation, aims to help higher education governing boards at both public and private institutions understand the complexities of the change process and find practical advice about policies and practices that facilitate change. The first section of the report poses the central change process questions of why change is needed, who will be involved, and how change should be made. The next section considers what the governing board should expect of campus leaders and how leadership and transitions in leadership affect change. The final section explores the governing board's role in institutional change, from embodying the values and behaviors the board espouses through creating an attitude and polices for change to monitoring progress and results. In the participating institutions that were successful in change while part of the ACE Project there were four habits of mind that contributed to successful change: (1) leaders approached change as a collaborative, "win-win" effort; (2) leaders were intentional in their actions; (3) leaders were reflective about change; and (4) leaders learned form their actions and adjusted their plans. In the final analysis, change is about combining learning with action. The board can play a key role in this process. (SLD)

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What Governing Boards Need to Know and Do About Institutional Change

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On Change IV

What Governing Boards Need to Know and Do About Institutional Change

Barbara Hill
Madeleine Green
Peter Eckel

An Occasional Paper Series of the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation and The Kellogg Forum on Higher Education Transformation

American Council on Education

ACE would like to thank the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for its steadfast support of these projects and for its commitment to strengthening higher education. ACE would also like to recognize the 23 institutions that participated in the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation and our colleagues from the Kellogg Forum on Higher Educational Transformation. Their efforts and participation provide the foundation for this publication.

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Foreword

Colleges and universities are constantly undergoing change of some type. Each academic year brings computer software upgrades and new courses, fresh scheduling issues, and an influx of faculty and staff members. This essay discusses a different kind of change, change that is more ambitious and that penetrates into the fabric of the institution. We call this change "transformational." For institutions to be successful with transformational change, the change must be both intentional and continuous. Governing boards have a key role to play in partnering with campus leaders to effect such major change.

Throughout this document, we suggest ways that the governing board (or the board of trustees or regents) can both lead and support change by paying special attention to the change process. The board should, of course, become as knowledgeable as possible about the substance of the change initiative–what is going to be changed and why. But it should also strive to understand the complexities of change in higher education and the ways in which it differs from change in other sectors.

Boards play a central role in focusing change and in holding the campus accountable for results. At the same time, the governing board can maximize the likelihood of accomplishing fundamental and enduring change by encouraging a change process that is inclusive, intentional, and reflective. This means that the board, either as a whole or through its committees, will want to have a new kind of conversation with campus leaders, one that goes beyond the usual definitions of accountability and takes a more collaborative approach to change. We urge boards to think of themselves as partners in the change process, rather than as sole proprietors or adversaries of other institutional stakeholders. Contrary to conventional wisdom, change is not always painful, nor need it spark a war between the change promoters and the change resistors. Change can be exhilarating and, if there is open and plentiful communication and room for respectful differences and dissent, it will be a positive rather than a threatening experience. But it is easy for boards–or, for that matter, any of the parties involved–to fall into the trap of over-control, distrust, suspicion, and accusation. These are the enemies of positive change, but they need not be inevitable.

This essay aims to help higher education governing boards–at all kinds of institutions, both public and private–understand the complexities of the change process and find practical advice about policies and practices that facilitate change. We recognize that significant differences exist between public and private boards, but the common tasks of stewardship form the framework of this essay. Individual boards will adapt the ideas presented here to the traditions and culture of their own institutions.

We hope this essay will be read not only by individual campus and board leaders, but also by the leadership teams that are so central to achieving positive institutional change.

We wish to recognize the contributions to our thinking and to this document by ACE Project consultants Mary-Linda Armacost, Patricia Plante, Narcisa Polonio, Donna Shavlik, and Robert Shoenberg; Michael Baer, senior vice president, ACE; Robert Glidden, president, Ohio University; Bette Landman, president, Beaver College; Ted Marchese, managing partner, Academic Search Consultants; and Thomas Longin, vice president, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

Madeleine Green
Vice President and Project Director
American Council on Education

Introduction

An important task of every college or university governing board is to clarify its roles and responsibilities and to continually monitor how well it is performing them. Setting the mission, overseeing the long-range planning, selecting and evaluating the president, and ensuring the financial health of the institution are tasks that only the board can accomplish. Analyzing the institution's environment, prodding the institution to take environmental conditions into account, and setting deadlines for action remain vital to the health of institutions. But in the context of institutional change, the ongoing work of the board takes on new dimensions as well as new urgency. Boards may additionally need to undertake new and different tasks and develop fresh ways of working that will facilitate institutional change.

The pressures affecting higher education are much the same as those faced by other not-for-profit organizations, for-profit corporations, and health care providers. Technology, globalization, accelerating competition, the explosion of knowledge, and the increasingly diverse nature of our society are changing the way that higher education thinks about itself and its work. The need to respond to changes in the environment in a timely fashion creates new challenges and anxieties for faculty, administrators, and boards. Governing boards must guide and oversee the difficult journey of change, balancing the needs for action and deliberation, working as partners with faculty and administrators, and taking into account the complexities of academic organization and culture.

For five years, 23 diverse colleges and universities worked on a range of large-scale institutional change initiatives as part of the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation. From their experiences, we have drawn a set of observations about the factors that helped some participants make progress and prevented others from moving forward. While every institution was different–shaped by its own history and traditions and characterized by its own culture–we believe that college and university leaders and their boards of directors can learn from the experiences of these participants.

The ACE project, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, aimed to help colleges and universities succeed with comprehensive or transformational change–a deep and pervasive type of intentional change that affects the institution as a whole rather than its discrete parts. While external pressures and forces played a role, what distinguished the institutions in the project was their intentionality about effecting change. Institutions undertook their change initiatives based upon internal decisions to act, rather than as hasty responses to external mandates, and usually campus administrators or faculty groups initiated the changes.

The institutions in the ACE project that were most successful in accomplishing change were guided by four understandings. First, they saw the value of being consistently reflective about the change process, learned from their experiences, and developed new capacities with which to face the future successfully.

Second, change leaders were guided by the recognition that change is not an event, with a beginning, middle, and comfortable endpoint. Rather it is an ongoing, organic process in which one change triggers another, often in unexpected places, and through which an interrelationship of the component parts leads to an unending cycle of reassessment and renewal. No wonder that change leaders so often worried about the dangers of burnout for all the key players. They also dealt with the anxiety that occurs when people realize that real change means there is no point in

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ACE RESOURCES ON THE CHANGE PROCESS

This publication is part of the On Change series of occasional papers that provide practical advice to campus leaders on the change process. They are available in PDF format on the ACE web site at http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/.

On Change I
En Route to Transformation (1998)
Occasional Paper No. 1, by Peter Eckel, Barbara Hill, and Madeleine Green
The report explores the concept of transformation in American higher education. The authors examine the debate over the type of change needed in academe. They offer a definition of the concept of transformation and differentiate it from other types of change, and they speculate on the conditions under which transformation is likely to occur based on the experiences of the 26 institutions initially participating in ACE's Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation.

On Change II
Reports from the Road: Insights on Institutional Change (1999)
Occasional Paper No. 2, by Peter Eckel, Barbara Hill, Madeleine Green, and Bill Mallon
This essay presents a series of observations about the factors that helped some institutions make progress on their institutional change agendas and prevented others from moving forward. Both the successful strategies and the missteps provide helpful insights for campus leaders engaged in change. The paper also explores the environmental and contextual factors that facilitate and impede institutions' progress.

On Change III
Taking Charge of Change: A Primer for Colleges and Universities (2000)
Occasional Paper No. 3, by Peter Eckel, Madeleine Green, Barbara Hill, and Bill Mallon
This guidebook provides resources for academic leaders who have embarked on the path of institutional change. The chapters cover topics such as understanding the change process, analyzing institutional culture, leading change with teams, engaging the campus community, and providing evidence of change. The stand-alone chapters can be used independently according to the interests and needs of the reader, or can be read consecutively. Each chapter includes discussion questions, checklists, and other tools to help institutional leaders be more reflective and intentional about their change processes.

time at which everyone can declare a victory and go back to "normal" life.

The third understanding was that comprehensive change requires holistic and integrated thinking about the institution. Rethinking undergraduate education is not just about changing course content or course offerings. It requires new approaches to student services, faculty development, assessment, and community involvement. While no institution can address everything all at once, the awareness that change triggers more change is an essential conceptual tool for leaders.

The fourth understanding was that successful change in higher education requires shared leadership and open communication. Few changes can simply be mandated in colleges and universities; a shared understanding of the need for change and the involvement of those who will implement the change in the planning process are essential ingredients of success. This collaborative approach can try the patience of board members, who may be impatient with the length and complexity of the consultation process required to result in widespread buy-in and legitimacy for the change agenda.

This essay explores questions that a governing board might ask itself and its institution's administrative leadership to facilitate the change process on campus and actions the board might take to both lead and encourage successful change.

How to Think About Change in an Academic Setting

The operating principle of the ACE project was that each institution determined its own agenda for change in response to a variety of external and internal contextual factors. The project built a conceptual framework within which change leaders examined the reasons for change (the "why"), crafted the substance of the agenda (the "what"), and designed the process (the "how," which includes the "who"). We learned that to be successful, institutions must pay careful attention to all of these elements and consider them as inextricably related. The three questions discussed below (Why does this institution need to change? Who will be involved and how? How should change be made?) are not sequential; institutions had to revisit these questions continually as they worked on their change agendas.

The 23 institutions in the five-year ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation pursued a variety of change agendas. Some were crafting an institutional plan for incorporating information technology into teaching and learning; some were realigning their curricula to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's students; and some were creating new academic structures and cultures to respond in holistic ways to their environments. No matter what their agendas, the successful strategies seemed to be consistent across all kinds of change initiatives. While a board will properly have questions about the substance of change on a campus, this essay focuses only on the importance of process issues that affect change. In this section, we pose the central process questions.

Why Does this Institution Need to Change?

The governing board has a particular challenge in helping the institution understand the need for change. All institutions seek to be better at what they do, but the desire to improve does not necessarily lead to the kind of rethinking that may be required. For some institutions, there is little urgency to change beyond the usual adjustments to programs, curriculum, or student life that occur all the time. If things are going well, it may be difficult to see the clouds on the horizon or the changing external realities that suggest that "business as usual" will not suffice indefinitely. For other institutions, the impending storm may seem closer. While they may recognize that change is needed, they may be content with a solution that leaves basic approaches and thinking unchanged.

The institutions in the ACE project that were most successful in accomplishing change were deliberate about examining the external environment and its implications for the future, and assessing the alignment of their mission and programs with the needs they identified. The need for change—rather than change for its own sake—became apparent when institutional leaders saw the new demands created by the changing environment or the gap between the institution's intentions and its actual results in areas such as achieving diversity, maximizing student success, or serving its communities. This need for change can be recognized only if an institution already keeps sufficient internal

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As a first step and as an ongoing exercise, the governing board should ask the administration to assess and interpret the external and internal environments in which the institution operates.

performance data that are important to the governing board. The trustees have a responsibility to insist on sufficient data and to ask difficult questions about it. A shared understanding of performance gaps or of opportunities to be seized is a powerful foundation for a change effort.

Developing this foundation is not easy, and the need for change had to be continually reassessed and reasserted. Institutions that were most successful in effecting change learned to take as a given the need to make the case for change and to promote its necessity until it was widely accepted. This was no simple task, because an individual's perception of the external environment and the institution frequently depends on his or her vantage point. Some faculty and staff find it difficult to see beyond their department or unit, which often creates tension between them and the senior administrators or the board. When those who do have a more global vision of the institution see the need for change, they face the challenge of communicating it to the rest of the community so that it engenders action and not anger, denial, or paralysis.

As a first step and as an ongoing exercise, the governing board should ask the administration to assess and interpret the external and internal environments in which the institution operates. The board should be especially sensitive to changes in that environment whose magnitude and intensity might indicate the need for significant change. For example, annual admissions information may show a slow but steady decrease in enrolled students, indicating the need for a systemic assessment of many possible contributing factors. The institution might need to look again at its mission and programs, pricing, the availability of financial aid, retention rates, the quality of student life on campus, etc. to plan a coherent response. On the other hand, a significant drop in one year might incite a more intense pressure for change, but that enrollment fluctuation might be merely situational and not systemic. A thorough administrative assessment can clarify the appropriate response.

It is important for the board to work with the campus leaders to assess the intensity of external pressure accurately and to collaborate in presenting this assessment in clear, understandable terms. The president and the board must first see eye-to-eye about the need for change before they can agree upon the strategy for change. This might require some thoughtful discussion between the president and an administrative or executive committee of the board. The goal is to help institutions see and interpret what is occurring so that they can act upon that information, which must be widely and freely shared. Once the board has collaboratively drawn attention to significant environmental pressures, the campus then can develop the particular solutions to the problems presented.

Who Will Be Involved and How?

Because far-reaching change affects all parts of an institution, campus-level steering committees and task forces are likely to have a range of participants who may not know one another and who may not have worked together in any capacity, including in the governance of the institution. The governing board should not dictate the particular persons involved, but should ensure that the process is inclusive and that a wide range of influential stakeholders is involved in a meaningful way. This means that participation should go well beyond "the usual suspects" to include those who will be involved in implementing the change; broad engagement is needed in the development and elaboration of the change initiative.

How Should Change Be Made?

A sound change process is crucial to a successful outcome. A challenge for boards engaged in institutional change may be revising their preconceived notions about the

change process. While change in higher education bears some similarities to change in other kinds of organizations, the experiences informing this essay suggest that colleges and universities benefit most from a different model of change because of the distinctiveness of academic culture. Given the structure and organization of higher education institutions and the centrality of academic values and purposes of teaching, research, and service, it is not surprising that corporate models of change do not easily adapt to renewal efforts at colleges and universities. For example, "buying in" to someone else's decision or vision in a corporate setting requires a profoundly different dynamic from doing so in the context of shared decision making. The change process in such a decentralized, value-driven, and historically aware organization may seem too indirect to some board members, but it is crucial for both successful acceptance of a change agenda and for learning new institutional behaviors. To be successful with institutional change, campus leaders, including boards, must be sensitive to these distinctive elements and respond to them in intentional and reflective ways.

The intense interactions of the ACE project staff and consultants with the institutions in the project suggest that governing boards can best support a change initiative on campus by regularly taking the pulse of the campus and creating opportunities for reflection. The board should inquire about what a campus is doing, how it is going about change, and what it is learning through its experiences. Additionally, the board may comfortably ask whether the campus has encountered any obstacles and what the next steps are going to be. By structuring opportunities for reflection about the process, the ACE project encouraged campus change leaders to develop new ways of thinking about their interactions and the effects of their work on campus. Regularly taking the institutional pulse brings the process into focus; it becomes an effective way of providing "space" to think about what is working and why, and to make necessary adjustments. Such a pattern of inquiry, which goes beyond the usual kinds of accountability, can easily be incorporated into the regular reports presented to the board. Additionally, making the change initiative an item on the agenda of governing board meetings and including it in the discussions at all campus retreats can enhance the importance of the initiative.

The board sends implicit signals to the campus when it designs reporting structures for a change initiative. The creation of an ad hoc committee that has a specific mandate and limited time frame can send a signal about the urgency of change and that the work of this group is not "business as usual." But the members of that group need to be influential board members, if their work is intended to be important. Alternatively, a board might want to assign a standing committee to oversee the change issue. Whether or not that action is perceived as underlining the importance of the issue will depend on how clearly the committee gives it special prominence and consideration. In both kinds of reporting structures, the duties of this committee must be very clear so that it is neither duplicating nor usurping the tasks of the campus work groups.

The information given in reports to the board about a change initiative should include an overview of the process, what has been accomplished, the incentives used, and the resources devoted to it. The board should be open to requests for resources beyond the general operating budget to support a change initiative. One institution, for example, successfully used funds from the quasi-endowment for an investment in a technological infrastructure to support a new first-year program to improve student retention. Others put the change initiative at the top of their list of fund-raising priorities.

Governing boards can best support a change initiative on campus by regularly taking the pulse of the campus and creating opportunities for reflection.

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What Should the Governing Board Expect of Campus Leaders?

In setting reasonable expectations for the president, governing boards may have to modify their assumptions about what constitutes a leader....

Institutional Change and the Role of the President

A key feature of successful change is the president's role in focusing campus attention on the agenda. The experience of the ACE project revealed that the presidential role varied from campus to campus, depending on the institution's size, traditions, and the change agenda. On some campuses, the president used a hands-on approach to the change initiative, working with the leadership team or writing strategic documents such as discussion papers. Direct presidential involvement was more common at small institutions. On other campuses, the president played the role of champion, prodder, and provider of incentives and resources. When the change initiative was focused on teaching and learning, the faculty played the more important role, and the chief academic officer was more directly involved than the president with the faculty leadership group.

Whether the presidential style is hands-on or indirect, any major institutional change requires presidential involvement. Thus, the board should understand that the president must be able to devote the requisite time and attention to change on campus. Presidents always juggle competing priorities in terms of external and internal roles, but there is no substitute for presidential participation on campus.

Board support of the president is critical for staying the course during a change initiative. Such support is important in three ways. The first involves supporting the president in the face of conflict. Because change initiatives may involve difficult decisions, the board should be prepared to support the president if and when campus resistance to change erupts in public disagreement and criticism. The second entails ensuring presidential vitality. Because change is a long-term effort, the board should be sensitive to leadership burnout, ensuring that the president has sufficient opportunities for personal and intellectual renewal during the process. The third involves supporting risk-taking. Because change initiatives often require moving into uncharted waters, the board should encourage the president in risk-taking and be tolerant of mistakes that are amenable to mid-course correction.

Leading with Teams and Evaluating Presidential Success with Change

In setting reasonable expectations for the president, governing boards may have to modify their assumptions about what constitutes a leader, especially considering that a president's role as enabler of the change process may sometimes be one of low visibility. Because effective change leadership enables many members of the academic community to participate in designing the future and realizing the vision, the president needs to share responsibility to enable others to participate meaningfully, and to give consistent focus to

Unless the board understands and supports collaborative leadership, it may not see a clear relation between the president's actions and the effects of the work of others.

institutional efforts. At most of the ACE project institutions, the president effectively supported the change process by encouraging the campus leadership team and the work of change leaders throughout the institution. The governing board dealing with institutional change can and should value a president who is a collaborative leader as much as it may previously have valued a "take charge" kind of leader.

The ACE project revealed that the president had to balance both visible and invisible work in the change process. On the one hand, the president had to be visible in championing the change agenda in public and in focusing the institution on the work to be done. On the other hand, the president had to delegate the work and the credit for success to individuals, a steering committee, or other groups working on related efforts across the campus. Such shared leadership makes the president's role and contribution less obvious and can present an added challenge to the board in presidential evaluation. Unless the board understands and supports collaborative leadership, it may not see a clear relation between the president's actions and the effects of the work of others. Further complicating presidential evaluation are the cultural shifts that accompany successful change and that are hard to quantify–an open climate, clear incentives, a sense of vitality, and positive morale among campus constituencies. To be fair, boards should include such holistic and non-quantitative criteria in addition to more concrete measures of accomplishments in presidential performance reviews.

How Leadership Transitions Affect Institutional Change

Within the 23 institutions that participated in the five-year life of the ACE project, 16 presidents and 14 provosts left, and 13 institutions turned over both positions. Only six had the leadership team intact over the full five years of the project. In those institutions where the initiative was widely embedded and dispersed throughout the institution through collaborative leadership, the change initiative proceeded in spite of the leadership transitions. At institutions without widespread acceptance of the change, or where it was identified as the president's agenda, progress was significantly interrupted or even derailed. While a governing board cannot control for all the personal and professional reasons that affect presidential departures, it can take actions that will encourage a successful president to stay or to delay a departure to a less critical time for the institution.

If a leadership change is imminent, however, the board can and should inform the campus that it intends to sustain change during the tenure of the next president and perhaps beyond. This is especially true when dealing with an extended interim presidency or deanship. By clearly embracing a change initiative that has appropriately developed on campus, a board can keep the long-term work of change on track, even with the distractions of a presidential search process.

Institutional Change and the Search Process

Searching for a new president during a change initiative presents several challenges, in terms of both expectations and process. If a governing board is truly invested in a change process that has begun, it will want to search specifically for a president who can lead the institution in that direction. Frequently, and often unconsciously, the search for a president or a provost focuses on new institutional directions rather than on sustaining positive change in progress. The search for new leaders tends to focus attention on what did not happen under the departing leader and on selecting a new leader with those strengths and qualities felt to be lacking in the departing president. The process may push candidates to declare their

"vision" for the campus when it is not clear that they have had sufficient time to investigate what is actually happening on the campus and what changes would be productive. A desire for someone who will "make everything right" is understandable but dangerous, as it seems to relieve all campus stakeholders, from board members to the personnel in the physical plant, of the responsibility to engage in the hard work of change. Through a thoughtful assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the institution's current situation and its personnel, a board is better positioned to enter a search process with realistic expectations about what needs to be preserved and what needs to be changed.

To appoint a new president, an institution may conduct its own search or it may use the services of a search firm. Each route has different implications for the continuity of a change initiative. Conducting an in-house search requires a greater institutional time commitment, which may, but need not, divert energy from the change initiative. Because of that, boards frequently turn to search firms for their expertise and capacity to handle the details of a search. In either case, a presidential search constitutes a significant distraction for the campus community, and those engaged in the change process may be inclined to take a "wait and see" attitude if they are uncertain about whether their agenda will receive continued support from the new leader and the board. The same reaction is also likely in the event of a transition to a new chief academic officer. Whether or not a search firm is used, it is imperative for the board to assess institutional needs and the tasks of a new leader at the outset of a search and use their findings to help identify an appropriate leader.

If a significant change is underway on campus, the board should pay particular attention to the change process. How much change has been made? Is the change "owned" by individuals and groups around campus? Is the campus poised to undertake a major new set of changes? The board must engage in frank discussion about the institution's strengths, weaknesses, and current needs so that progress on the change agenda is not derailed or set aside. If continuity is deemed important, a search committee might want to give greater weight to strong internal candidates, who probably have valuable insights about institutional culture as it relates to the change process.

There are many standard academic jokes about blaming a predecessor for all one's problems. In many cases, it is important that the board select a new president who sincerely believes that it is no shame to continue the good work of the outgoing president. Faculty and staff who have dedicated time, passion, and energy to the change effort will become cynical and disaffected if their good work falls victim to the "change agenda du jour" and the inability or unwillingness of the board and the new president to stay the course. Several institutions in the ACE project successfully structured search processes that ensured that the institution continued with its existing change initiative. Boards publicly committed themselves to the continuation of the initiative and engaged the presidential candidates in conversation about how they might strengthen and deepen the change. It was an opportunity for the board to take stock of progress to date and to envision a future connected to the accomplishments of the recent past. In fact, a well-conducted search can provide a real opportunity for the campus to infuse new energy into the change process. This does not prevent a new president from giving a new focus to a change initiative. On the contrary, the new leader has ample room to give his or her personal stamp to the project.

The board must engage in frank discussion about the institution's strengths, weaknesses, and current needs so that progress on the change agenda is not derailed or set aside.

What Is the Governing Board's Role in Institutional Change?

Merely mandating a change is not sufficient to make it happen. If the faculty and staff who must implement change do not play a central role in creating new approaches and do not feel ownership of them, the changes are likely to be superficial and short-lived. The board's role is to set the direction, provide support, and monitor change. Board micro-management is as counterproductive in the change process as it is in the regular governance process.

Of particular importance is the board's capacity to assess the environment in which the institution operates. However, it is usually not in a position to know precisely what substantive change would be best or how it can be most effectively accomplished. Thus, the board should plant the seeds for change by bringing to the attention of the president and the campus community those external pressures that suggest the need for change. It also needs to monitor internal data trends and be alert to change signals. In either case, the board should hold the institution accountable for an appropriate response, making clear its process expectations and the timeline. But the board should not insist on any particular response or on any particular means to achieving a response. In this section, we outline the key roles played by boards in fostering and monitoring change.

Embodying the Values and Behaviors the Board Espouses

A governing board that is serious about its role in fostering change must embody the values it espouses and practice what it preaches. That means being ready to change itself–in board membership (for some institutions) and in the way it does business. Does the board set goals for itself and monitor its own effectiveness? Does it look periodically at its structure? How are meetings organized and how well does the board use its time? Does the board monitor how it walks the line between making policy and getting too involved in administration? In short, is the board itself reflective about its own operation and amenable to changing the way it does business?

A second important characteristic for boards is openness. Some states deal with this issue through sunshine laws, which present their own complications. Sunshine laws have positive effects, preventing secrecy and promoting transparency in the work of the board. They also may work against board effectiveness, since all business must be done in public. They may impede easy communications, which are so important to building trust and common points of view in the change process. In some institutions, however, the board is remote and its operation mysterious. Just as it is incumbent upon the president and senior administrators to be as open as possible throughout the change process, it is important for boards to do the

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same. The trust engendered by giving more people on campus access to information diminishes anxiety and suspicion and strengthens the capacity for collaboration among various campus groups.

Creating a Positive Climate for Change

Major change requires energy generated by a positive campus climate, that is, a climate characterized by mutual respect, trust, and open communications. The board should monitor the campus climate and take responsibility for its own impact on that environment. If the campus is characterized by internal conflict, the board should ask if the discord is a reasonable response to a particular situation or an accumulated set of dysfunctional habits developed in a persistent atmosphere of distrust. Conflict absorbs energy, drawing it away from a change initiative. Climates of good will and productivity are created through inclusive conversations over time. They are characterized by abundant communication, free flow of information, and genuine participation. The board must set the tone for the entire institution in terms of openness and the sharing of information. Finger-pointing is especially unhelpful; an institution's position is unlikely to be the result of one group's activities (for example, the faculty), let alone the result of one person's actions (for example, the admissions director). If conflict has been an institutional norm, a board can encourage, by example and expectation, the sense that change in institutional systems and practices is needed so that productive relations can develop. The institution's case for change has the best chance of success if it is framed as a blame-free agenda.

It is worth repeating that the governing board's conduct is key. The existence of board cliques sends a powerful message about the climate "at the top" and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to establish good working partnerships with campus groups.

What the Board Can Do to Help Create an Effective Climate for Change

Develop the habit of holding inclusive conversations with administrators, faculty, and staff that respect the roles and responsibilities of the president.

Freely share data and other information about the external environment and the institution.

Be willing to accept and act upon reliable new data and information, no matter what the source.

Ask the campus to articulate how the range of solutions under consideration is related to the problems identified.

Encourage a blame-free climate in both formal policies and informal practices.

Monitoring and Aligning Practices and Policies with Mission

Some change efforts aim to realign practices in curricula, personnel policies, student affairs, and reward systems with the institution's mission. Consider the institution whose mission statement emphatically declares its student-centered mission. But institutional studies and feedback from students make it clear that its practices and policies do not necessarily support that stated value. Student advising is inadequate; promotion and tenure criteria do not sufficiently recognize good teaching; first- and second-year students too often find themselves in large lecture classes with little opportunity to interact with professors. Thus, the values implicit and explicit in a mission statement may be at risk if an institution does not respond to inconsistencies between its mission and its practices.

Only a few stakeholders, including the major one, the governing board, have an institution-wide perspective sufficient to see

consistency of practice with stated values as well as coherence across the institution. Given that the board has the responsibility to set the direction of the institution by articulating its mission, this fundamental policy statement needs to be regularly revisited to see that it is clear, meaningful, and up-to-date, and that policies and practices are reviewed against this yardstick.

Taking the Long View, or Balancing Pressure with Patience

A governing board must become sufficiently involved if it is to support the president and administration in effecting change. The board must clearly understand the reasons for change, the process by which change will be effected, and at least some of the results anticipated. What will constitute success?

The seemingly slow rate of change in colleges and universities is often an issue with boards. Comparisons with business are often made to underscore the slow rate of academic change and the need for institutions to become more agile and responsive. While the deliberateness of faculty governance may contribute to the comparatively slow pace of change, other contributing factors include the need for widespread discussion and consultation, and the challenge of aligning many related changes such as curriculum, faculty development, and tenure policies. Thus, the challenge for boards is to keep the pressure on institutional leaders and faculty to accelerate the pace of change, while at the same time recognizing the importance of deliberation and widespread participation. Without active engagement and leadership by senior administrators and key faculty members, major change affecting the heart of the enterprise is, in most instances, doomed to failure.

The preparatory work for a change initiative can be frustratingly slow to boards of trustees, especially if their corporate experience suggests that change should be swift and decisive. One institution in the ACE project sought to undertake its first major curriculum overhaul in several decades. A faculty-led team began with an exhaustive, institution-wide discussion of the aims of undergraduate education and of teaching and learning, educating the campus community in the process of building support for change. Seemingly endless forums and debates prepared the groundwork for major curricular change and led the campus to re-examine pedagogy, student services, and academic structures. Taking time at the front end brought about substantial change in areas beyond the curriculum later on.

Boards may also become impatient because of the ongoing nature of change. It is often difficult to declare a change accomplished. One change leads to another, and new needs arise in a cascading effect. The following example may help clarify this point. One institution chose to deal with an inadequate undergraduate enrollment by expanding its services through a series of graduate programs. Early in the project, select departments prepared curricula and the admissions office created marketing plans and admitting procedures. Buoyed by these initial successes, other departments began to consider adding programs and personnel. Later, when the graduate student population reached a critical mass, their needs had to be taken into account in the student affairs office and governance structures of the college, triggering a new set of related changes. This work is still in process.

This example illustrates some of the issues affecting the rate of change and the board's perception of progress or lack thereof. Because one change engenders another, the process may seem endless. As a result, the board should ask for interim assessments of the change initiative, with the clear understanding that more activity may be undertaken and that more time may elapse before the work is done. To expect significant, far-reaching, and deeply penetrating

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change at an institution in one year, or two, may be completely unrealistic.

Monitoring Progress and Results

Historically, monitoring institutional health and progress have been central governing board functions. The board's role in the change process is no exception. The board must ensure that goals are set, processes are in place for the institution to monitor its progress toward these goals, and the president and key leaders are held accountable for results.

The specific evidence of change a board seeks will be tied to the substantive goals of the change initiative. Improving teaching and learning requires a different kind of evidence from an initiative concerned with creating an entrepreneurial institution. Some forms of evidence sought by the board will be fairly explicit and straightforward. The following list offers some illustrations of these explicit indicators of change:

- ☐ Changes in curriculum.
- ☐ Changes in pedagogical approaches.
- ☐ Changes in policies.
- ☐ Changes in budgets.
- ☐ New institutional structures.
- ☐ Changes in external relationships.

But not all evidence of change is so concrete; some essential changes are qualitative and cultural. We have found that all these also are indicators of an ongoing, successful change initiative. Such underlying evidence may include:

- ☐ New patterns of interactions and conversations within and among key stakeholders.
- ☐ New language and self-concepts.
- ☐ New decision-making processes.
- ☐ A different "tone" on campus.
- ☐ A clearer sense of institutional self-image.

Institutions need to be able to demonstrate as clearly as possible the effect of their decisions. If a board is to be a partner in the change process, monitoring progress should be both a formative process and a consistent demonstration of support. This will allow for making mid-course corrections, should they prove necessary. The journey of change is unpredictable, and it will be most successful if those engaged have the opportunity to take risks and learn from their mistakes. A board that encourages innovation and experimentation will be more likely to elicit creativity than one that only plays the role of inspector and judge.

Conclusion

No precise mixture of strategies led particular institutions in the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation down the road to success while others stumbled. The 26 institutions were in different stages of the change process when they entered the project. Some had just embarked on their change initiatives when they joined the ACE project; others had been working on their efforts for several years. Each institution had its ups and downs, its mistakes and unexpected victories. Some started with enormous energy and then faltered; others took a while to build momentum. Charting the course of change is as difficult as predicting its effects.

The governing board's role is to assess the environment, create a climate for change, and support the president, administration, and faculty in accomplishing the hard work of change. By setting expectations and asking for responses that demonstrate progress and learning, the board members will be giving their institutions the legacy of productive habits that will last beyond their tenure on the board. An institution can have no better champions.

No matter how many successful strategies an institution employed or how well the strategies were executed, success could ultimately be traced to four habits of mind displayed by boards and change leaders:

- ☐ They approached change as a collaborative, "win-win" effort.
- ☐ They were intentional in their actions, so that change was an act to be managed, not a random occurrence to be endured.
- ☐ They were reflective about their change endeavors.
- ☐ They learned from their actions and adjusted their plans. Their change agendas were dynamic, not static, suggesting that the strategies and behaviors that were learned could be used again and again, giving the institutions new ways to respond to the challenges of their environments.

In the final analysis, change is about combining learning with action. The board can play a key role in encouraging the institution to be become a learning organization with the capacity for continuous change through the climate it creates and sustains.

The governing board's role is to assess the environment, create a climate for change, and support the president, administration, and faculty in accomplishing the hard work of change.

ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation
Institutions and Their Change Initiatives

Ball State University (IN)
Redefining Relationships with the Larger Community

Bowie State University (MD)
Shared Governance, Outcomes Assessment, and Merit-Based Performance Pay

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
Developing and Implementing an Integrated Strategy for Enhancing Learning and Teaching with Technology

Centenary College of Louisiana
Strengthening the Academic Community without Sacrificing Academic Freedom

The City College of the City University of New York
Maximizing Student Success

College of DuPage (IL)
A Transformative Planning Process

El Paso Community College District (TX)
The Pathway to the Future/El Paso Al Futuro

Kent State University (OH)
Moving the Strategic Plan Forward: Cross-Unit Planning and Implementing

Knox College (IL)
Faculty Life in a Changing Environment: Family, Profession, Students and Institutional Values

Maricopa County Community College District (AZ)
Learning@Maricopa.edu

Michigan State University
Enhancing the Intensity of the Academic Environment

Mills College (CA)
Re-examine and Revitalize the Interrelationship Between Undergraduate Women's Education and Specialized Graduate Programs for Women and Men

Northeastern University (MA)
Call to Action on Cooperative Education

Olivet College (MI)
Creating a Culture of Individual and Social Responsibility

Portland State University (OR)
Developing Faculty for the Urban University of the 21st Century

Seton Hall University (NJ)
Transforming the Learning Environment

State University of New York College at Geneseo
Review, Debate, and Revision of General Education Requirements

Stephen F. Austin University (TX)
Revitalizing Faculty, Administration and Staff

University of Arizona
Building Academic Community: Department Heads as Catalysts

University of Hartford (CT) *
Planning and Managing Technology

University of Massachusetts, Boston
Assessing Student Outcomes

University of Minnesota
Improving the Collegiate Experience for First-Year Students

University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras
Reconceptualizing the Baccalaureate Degree

University of Wisconsin–La Crosse *
Building Community: An Institutional Approach to Academic Excellence

Valencia Community College (FL)
Becoming a Learning-Centered College: Improving Learning by Collaborating to Transform Core College Processes

Wellesley College (MA) *
Improving the Intellectual Life of the College

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** Participated in years 1-3.*

Kellogg Forum on Higher Education Transformation

In 1995, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation launched the Kellogg Network on Transformation (KNIT), an initiative "to learn and work with institutions, helping them to transform themselves to be more flexible, accountable, collaborative, and responsive to students, faculty, the communities, and the regions they serve." This initiative identified, encouraged, and supported five institutions as distinctive, emerging models of institutional change. Through the network, the foundation aimed to use strategic institutional change models to build capacity for change across sectors of higher education.

In early 1997, foundation leaders decided to seek partners that could assist them in researching and understanding the change process and in working with the designated KNIT institutions. To this end, the foundation established the Kellogg Forum on Higher Education Transformation in May 1998 with the purpose of bringing together scholars and practitioners in higher education to translate the experiences of individual campuses into learning that could be adapted and replicated.

Participants in the Kellogg Forum on Higher Education Transformation are:

Alverno College (WI)

American Council on Education

The Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan

The Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California–Los Angeles

Minnesota State College and University System

The New England Resource Center for Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston

Olivet College (MI)

Portland State University (OR)

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation

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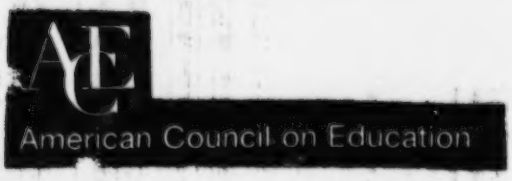
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